



GILA NEWSLETTER

11TH EDITION

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EUCOM CSM Visits KFOR



CSM John Mersino of European Command (middle) walks through the streets of Gnjilane, Kosovo with ISG Farrell Williams (left) and SGT Gladston Phinn, squad leader, both from Company B, 9th Engineers during a recent tour of Multi-National Brigade (East).

While select members of Bravo Company had the privilege taking CSM John Mersino, EUCOM CSM, on a patrol in Gnjilane, the remainder of 9E's NCOs attended an interactive lecture with the CSM at Camp Bondsteel's theater. CSM Mersino's message was filled with words and encouragement truly appreciated by all soldiers, especially NCOs, his target audience.

CSM Mersino's words could not have come at a better time. Leaders on the ground, especially NCOs, are the first line supervisors that ensure our soldiers remain properly trained and safe. Only a few days after his visit leader skills were put to the test. A series of explosions rocked the town of Klokot in the middle of the week. Engineers from Bravo Company, 54th Engineer Battalion responded to the scene. It was at this time another explosion injured two B/54th soldiers. Yet, due to NCO enforcement of uniform standards, specifically wearing protective equipment, both soldiers sustained serious, but not permanent, injuries. They are expected to fully recover.

9E Gathers for Hail and Farewell

Normally battalion hail and farewells provide a forum for welcoming in new members to the Gila family and saying good-bye to those leaving. Yet, on July 26th, the Gilas were treated to both a promotion and achievement award presentation. 1LT Chris Ix was hailed into the battalion on the same day he received promotion to the rank of First Lieutenant. Likewise, 1LT Ralan Hill was formally recognized for his efforts while assigned to Bravo Company by receiving the Army Achievement Medal. LT Hill now serves as the HHC XO. Congratulations to both officers.



1LT Christopher Ix, Bravo Company, receives his promotion certificate from LTC Idlet at the 26 JUL 02 Hail and Farewell

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TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)



HHC/9E: Headhunters

This week was a slightly less hectic than some of our previous weeks. Nevertheless, HHC has continued to provide excellent support to the battalion. The S-shops work can be complicated and long with all the missions, briefings, driving commitments, and reports that go to different commands and different posts. The S3 shop managed to continue 24 hour operations and cover down for their peers as 3 soldiers made it to the R&R program in Bulgaria. No serious incidents fortunately while they were gone. However, the Engineer Recon Team has been very busy conducting reconnaissance of various routes and bridges in Multinational Brigade (East). They have been given the task of doing a thorough reconnaissance and all related paperwork on every bridge in the Brigade's area of operation. Let's here it for Sergeant Kenneth Beare, Specialist Stephen Wilson, Specialist Joshua Benitez, and the newest member Specialist Joshua Seawright.



KFOR Commander French General Valentine speaks freely while Support Platoon soldiers provide security in the background

The maintenance team has been working extremely long hours and through difficult times as they split their section into the regular battalion maintenance and Technical Inspection (TI) teams to prepare vehicles for turn in. Just another sign that we are slowly shifting into transition gear and preparing to return home! It won't be long now. Sergeant Gregory Burrison and his soldiers continue to work diligently fixing and improving the status of the vehicles being turned back in to the installation. Sergeant Michelle Nabity, who had to give up soldiers for the TI team, has been continuing to work on the rest of the vehicles, as well as handling services and other administrative actions.

Specialist Olga Maldonado works with the line companies for force protection but she also has been going out on missions as an interpreter with our French counterparts. Specialist Justin Ellison can be found driving late nights on recovery missions and conducting daytime training as one of the battalion's Russian speakers. All the members of maintenance do a great job and we don't envy their long hours of work in rain and mud.



Sergeant Burrison meticulously prepares paperwork for over 75 vehicles that the Battalion is preparing to turn in.

In other news, Support Platoon provided security during the opening ceremony of the Route Lion bypass. Specialist Jessica Haffner and Sergeant First Class Stacey Stanley demonstrated the improved capacity of the bypass with an inaugural drive-through in their 3.4 ton HEMMT Cargo Carrier.

Each section has been utilizing every opportunity to train. The medics conducted more Expert Field Medical Badge training with help from Sergeant First Class Smith, Staff Sergeant Orville Wilson, and Staff Sergeant Erik Carroll. They have been training hard for weeks and continue driving on. If you look around you also see soldiers improving themselves with countless numbers in college and many doing military correspondence. As the Headhunter team provides continuous support to Task Force 9th Engineers, we all greatly appreciate your support from home. Have fun and take care.

Until next week,
HEADHUNTERS!





A/9E: Breach Hell!

Finishing out a mission company cycle and moving into a force protection rotation is how Alpha Company carried on this week. For the first four days of the week, the pace was as quick as it had been throughout the entire mission company cycle; only letting up once we moved into period of guard. For the soldiers, guard proves to be a very stressful time, not only because they are required to maintain a high state of discipline, but also because they are required to undergo many uniform and knowledge inspections.

Early this week, 1st Platoon was called out on a QRF mission to set up a checkpoint near the Serbian border to prevent illegal crossing and smuggling. After establishing the checkpoint, 1st Platoon conducted searches of vehicles and checked the IDs of the people attempting to enter Kosovo. Additionally, 2LT Dunker used some of the knowledge he gained while at school in England and acted as a search advisor for four “all arms” search teams that conducted area and house searches in sector. The teams conducted professional searches and found several weapons and ammunition.

The Dirty Deuce said ‘goodbye’ to another soldier this week with the departure of SPC Andersen. SPC Andersen worked hard for three years in the Dirty Deuce and plans on going to college after his ETS from the army, hopefully returning as an officer. The platoon was fortunate to have him spend a month down in Kosovo as he proved to be a very valuable sapper. Currently, 2nd Platoon is helping keep Camp Bondsteel safe by conducting tower and gate guard operations.



LTC Idlet presents SPC Andersen with an AAM, Kosovo and NATO campaign ribbons

SPC Robinson, J., A Co, digs a 25 foot protective trench with his FLU 419 SEE for 1-35 Armor at Camp Diablo



PFC Clark attacks a tree. His tireless efforts during construction of the EFMB lanes were a great asset to his fellow sappers.

3rd Platoon continued with Camp Bondsteel force protection duties throughout the week. By the time SSG Brokmeier and SPC Robinson had completed their SEE mission that took place at the end of last week, Armor and Marine soldiers had 16 crew served fighting positions and 85 feet of trench for their respective base camps. Our sappers received excellent training and completed their work to standard. The platoon has settled in for an extended period of force protection to allow C Company to provide additional engineer support in sector. It's a demanding, tiring job at times but one that we all know is important to the rest of our team living here.

Headquarters platoon has continued to perform its daily juggling act of personnel versus tasks. This week, however, has proven even more interesting than most because the Operations NCO, SFC Williams, had to temporarily return to Germany. “No problem, I have it covered,” said SPC Letcher, who has been performing a marvelous job as Operations NCO in SFC Williams absence.

As we chalk up another week finished, we remember that it means we are another week closer to successfully completing the mission here. We wish our friends and family in Germany and the States the best, rest assured that we're all doing beautifully as the time continues to fly by.



TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)



B/9E: Outlaws

Dear Outlaw Families,

The pictures this week are dedicated to our mechanics. They perform quite a bit of the behind the scenes work, that allows the rest of the company to function. The head mechanic, SSG Calder, leaves us today. He will be greatly missed by the entire company, but he will do great things for HHC. In the pictures, you can see that we are still working on our engineer equipment. PFC Morales and SGT Evans are assuring that one of our M9 ACEs is prepared for 3rd Platoon's digging exercise. SPC Adler took a quick break from maintenance to become the newest E-5 in the United States Army. Chaplain Gregory, from TF 1-77, has adopted our company and goes on patrol with us every week. Last week, Chaplain Gregory and I decided to take a stroll with the only piece of equipment that even our mechanics would have a problem with, the dreaded Kosovo Harley. People in the city drive these contraptions all over the place. They use them to haul and cut wood, go to market and to haul hay.



This has been an interesting week. We searched a house, and luckily did not have to apprehend anybody. The best part about the entire mission was the exciting rehearsals that 1st platoon performed. They had ladders, tools, trucks, hand cuffs, medics and many soldiers in a small area. The training was highly realistic, but from a distance we probably looked like the Keystone Cops. The mission was a complete success. After the mission, we received the word that we would be soon able to patrol in just our normal duty uniform without body armor. This good news only lasted for one day. The next day there was an explosion a few miles from here and 2 U.S. soldiers were injured. None of the soldiers were from our company, but we have increased our uniform to include ballistic plates. I do not feel that any of our soldiers are in danger, but it is better to be cautious than have someone injured. We will continue to take every precaution possible to assure that each Outlaw Soldier returns to central region safely.

We have also begun some reintegration training, so that each soldier understands that time did not stand still in central region during our deployment. The classes will continue until the time that we redeploy. I highly encourage that you also attend the reintegration training that will be occurring in Schweinfurt. Just call the company for details. To make it easy, you will be able to attend training provided by TF 1-77, TF 9E, and I'm sure that TF 1-26 would be more than happy to accommodate you.

God Bless,

CPT Bill Lash

TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)





C/9E: Dawgs of War

Another great week passes at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. We want to reassure everyone back home that all our Sappers are alive and well!!! We were not involved in the recent explosions here in the province of Kosovo. I would like to relay that the two sappers from B/54 Engineer battalion who were are in stable condition here at Camp Bondsteel.

This week we switched from Force Protection to our mission platoon and Quick Reaction Force cycle. The soldiers enjoy the break from the tedious tower guard duties and look forward to more challenging training and missions outside the base.

A&O started the week with a crater mission that closed off a trail from the FYROM border denying use of it to smugglers, illegal woodcutters and any potential insurgents, adding stability to Kosovo and FYROM. The mission was a huge success and a crater and complex timber and wire obstacle now blocks a mountain trail thanks to our soldiers' spectacular efforts. To build it they had to chip down through about three feet of rock in some places to emplace the charges! They ended the day with blistered hands, aching bodies, tired eyes and enormous smiles at a mission accomplished superbly!



Dawg Sappers working on emplacing shape charges



A&O soldiers pose inside their hard earned crater

ILT Christopher confers with the Germans on where to emplace the obstacle



A&O proofs their work with shape charges- everything looks good

We started the company change of command inventories with 1st Platoon conducting inventories first. After the inventories, SFC Cadena departed for ANCOC and SSG Villanueva filled in as platoon sergeant. In response to the explosions in Klokot, the MNB(E) Headquarters attached the platoon out in sector to help conduct patrols and traffic control points in the town in the hope that we will capture the culprits. The soldiers are extremely alert and motivated to make a difference out in sector.

Second Platoon used the Small Arms Visual Trainer (SAVT), a computerized firing range with weapons and lasers that simulate the M16 to a high degree of accuracy. They love it as it gives them a chance to sharpen their shooting and decision-making skills in the various scenarios. They have "shoot-no-shoot" and "urban combat" to name just a few scenarios and this allows the guys to practice at things that we have a hard time setting up a exercise for.

Today the Battalion Commander promoted CPL Tuthill to Sergeant. Sergeant Tuthill is looking forward to doing great things in 2nd platoon.

The company continues to improve, growing tighter as the rotation continues. I am deeply touched and never imagined commanding such a cohesive unit – it is such a blessing and a humbling experience to serve with such committed and great soldiers!!! I hope that you can understand how very proud you should be of your soldiers. They represent the best in the American people and the families that support them! God bless them every day and may God bless you too!

Dawg 6





A/94E: Warriors

The Alpha Warriors are gearing up again! It has been a quiet week after the Route Lion Bypass Ribbon Cutting Ceremony. We have been focusing on the maintenance of both our equipment and personnel so that we will be prepared for the future missions that are headed our way. Currently, we are focusing and preparing for four missions: a 5km VCN access road upgrade which requires the placement of 3000 cubic meters of gravel; training with the British Royal Engineers in the installation of a Mabey Johnson Bridge along Route Hawk; a roofing project for the S-4 yard which will save thousands of dollars in lumber; and a school grounds upgrade in Camina Glava for children to play. These projects will further test the construction skills of the Alpha Warriors, as well as their ability to manage and successfully accomplish multiple projects at once. This will also test our maintenance capability, as the majority of our equipment will be utilized over the next few weeks. Along with these missions, the Alpha Warriors will also continue to juggle the many tasking headed our way from Battalion. Regardless of the task, whether big or small, the Alpha Warriors will be ready to execute. Alpha Warriors!





737th EOD

Aftershock 737 continues to conduct all missions assigned, providing excellent support to the entire MNB-E (Multi-National-Brigade East) sector. 737th is continuing with its partnership with other EOD units from other countries. This week we had two partnerships with Danish and German EOD units. A great deal was learned from the Danish and German EOD on their techniques, tactics and procedures. SSG Hood and SSG Williams were able to assist (conduct) a post-blast investigation. This post blast involved the use of a cell phone as the initiator. The goal of the terrorist was to destroy a monastery at the bottom of a hill with a large boulder. The attempt was unsuccessful. SSG Hood and SSG Williams were very helpful in determining the device that was used to try and move the boulder down the hill to destroy the monastery. Aftershock also participated in a grave exhumation to recover bodies that could have been booby-trapped during the war. The unit also conducted the post-blast investigation for explosions in Klokot. Aftershock was able to check the scene for secondary devices and determine the device used in one of the explosions. Two US soldiers were injured, fortunately not seriously. We also received a streamer for having 180 days of zero accidents. As we approach our 90-day mark the unit continues to focus on mission requirements. The OPTEMPO remains steady. Vigilance and safety continue to be the unit's underlying priorities during all phases of this peacekeeping operation.

CPT Green



SSG Hood and SSG Williams ascend a small mountain for post blast incident investigation



SSG Hood poses with members of German EOD



EOD soldiers pose with their Danish EOD counterparts



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

"Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have." (Margaret Mead)
It feels so good to know that we are making a difference in Kosovo. Now, for the most part, men, women, and children can live in peace and security because we are here. We are encouraging the people of Kosovo to be tolerant and democratic. We hope and pray that one day they will be much more than tolerant; We pray that they will actually encourage each other to be all that they can be no matter what the ethnic or religious background. It is then and only then that Kosovo will truly be free! We are involved then in the liberation of Kosovo from prejudice and hatred. We, as always, are winning!!! First To Cross!!!

JAMES W. BLOUNT
Chaplain (CPT) USA
Battalion Chaplain



TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)

From the Commander

August is here and it will bring some interesting times for the Gila Team. We continue to conduct force protection on Camp Bondsteel. Our support around the Brigade Area remains significant, as our engineers are always ready and able to meet the call. We have some great missions planned this month that require our engineer know how. We will continue to conduct opportunity training on our fundamental combat engineering skills, the stuff our soldiers love to do, but, do not get enough time to do. A soldiers' talent show is in the works and undoubtedly TF 9E will headline in many areas. We have some great talents.

Morale remains at an acceptable level seven. Thanks goes out to the great job our very own Chaplain, Chaplain Blount is doing, we can assess where our morale stands on a weekly bases. At this time indicators suggest we are at a seven out of 10. Seven represents a strong above average rating. This area is the biggest force multiplier that I have in determining how we are doing as a unit. I base the unit's morale level on input from the Chaplain, leaders and soldiers. Assessments are conducted on many levels in order to analyze how soldiers are doing, how family members are doing, how the Rear Detachment / Family Readiness Group is doing and what steps do we have to take to keep morale high. A huge factor in the morale of a unit is the personal hardships endured during this time frame. The Gila families have regrettably had our share. We remain prayerful and as always remain ready to lend our support.

Change is the biggest theme for this month. A very significant change is the way we execute individual force protection measures. Simply put, Kosovo has changed dramatically since the arrival of our forces in June 1999. Since that time violent crime and incidents involving violence have decreased by over 66%. Further, in the last year alone, the number of incidents involving violence has been cut in half. This is due to great partnerships with all elements working in Kosovo and the desire for the people of Kosovo to live in peace. After careful analysis of the situation in Kosovo and the great discipline displayed by our soldiers, we have reduced our uniform posture to meet the changing environment. Depending on the particular mission, leaders are authorized to change the uniform to meet the needs for what they are executing and allow soldiers to proceed without the Kevlar and/or armored vest. As always, our soldiers' safety remains the number one priority, therefore, they will always have their Kevlar helmet and armored vest accessible in order to upgrade their force protection posture. I remain confident that our great soldiers will always be prepared for any situation. They have continued to impress me everyday. They continually receive high praise from visitors about the great work their doing. I remain very proud of our team and it's only because of them that Kosovo remains a safe and secure environment.

I cannot tell you how proud I am of the great soldiers and leaders of this Task Force. Everyday I am impressed by what they do for this brigade, the Army and Nation. They are winners on every front. I am equally proud of the great job our Rear Detachment is doing. Knowing that our family members are well taken care of is a major motivator for us while we do this mission. We must keep the line of communications open and always ask for help when needed. My phone line is available if you ever need assistance. Remember we are all in this together.

First to Cross!

LTC Nat Idlet

Editor in Chief
The Gila Adjutant

TASK FORCE 9TH ENGINEER (C)

